



Can social and emotional factors impact injury risk and recovery?

Yes. Parents and coaches can help athletes reduce their injury risk and facilitate recovery by paying attention to social and emotional elements.

Research shows significant life stress can be linked with injury risk. Both negative stress, like a family divorce, and positive stress, like being named football captain, affect risk.

Resilience is an athlete's capacity to maintain psychological and physical well-being in the face of adversity.

Athletes can build resilience by focusing on the positives, visualizing realistic goals, and getting support when needed.



How can concerned coaches and parents help?

Help players build a resiliency toolbox. Athletes who develop these techniques before encountering stress are better-equipped to overcome challenges, less likely to become injured and may play better in the face of stress.

Research shows stress reduction techniques—such as mindfulness, breathing and relaxation exercises—can lower injury risk.

Just 15 minutes once a week can make a difference. Another approach is to weave mindfulness into the daily schedule: before school, during lunch, after practice.



TIP

Teach your athlete about R.A.I.N.

RECOGNIZE when a strong emotion is present

ALLOW or acknowledge the emotion

INVESTIGATE and inquire about the body, feelings and mind

NON-IDENTIFY with strong emotions

Coping resources

Thoughtful time off

Athletes often live by the sport ethic and don't want to disappoint teammates by taking a day off or missing practice. Sometimes, what stressed athletes need most is a bit of recovery time. Under recovery or burnout is a significant contributor to injury and stress.

A good social network

Athletes with good social support systems have a lower risk for injury than those who lack these networks. Check to see if kids are connected to teammates, other friends or family.

Injured athletes and resilience

Athletes who face an injury, such as an ACL tear, concussion or fracture, that requires time away from their sport almost always contend with additional stress. Sitting on the sidelines is very difficult, and some athletes prefer to detach from the team. Some prefer to stay connected in whatever way they can. It's important to help determine what works best for them.

No matter how an athlete approaches stress it's important that adults look for signs of depression and consult a sports psychologist or other caregiver if they believe a player needs additional support.

TIP

Teach your athlete to S.T.O.P. when faced with stress

STOP what you are doing and put things down for a minute.

TAKE a breath, breathe naturally, and follow your breath coming in and out of your nose.

OBSERVE your thoughts, feelings and emotions. Reflect about what is on your mind. Remember thoughts are not facts, and they are not permanent. Then notice your body. Are you standing or sitting? How is your posture? Any aches and pains?

PROCEED with something that will support you in the moment. Try talking to a friend or rubbing your shoulders.



Question from a concerned parent

I'm worried about my daughter. She is a varsity athlete and isn't getting as much playing time as she would like. She seems unhappy.

Your athlete may be stressed if she faces a position change or if her coach isn't playing her as much as she wants. The more athletes hang on to negative emotions, whether they stem from a coach's decision or missing a save as a hockey goalie, the higher their injury risk because their attention is not where it's supposed to be.

Teach athletes to reach into their self-care toolbox to overcome tough times. One reminder usually isn't enough to help teens manage stress. Make time to discuss self-care, mindfulness and resilience on a regular basis.



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This sheet is part of the Injury Prevention Series, which is a suite of educational materials to help athletes live the healthiest lives possible while competing. For more materials on sports injury prevention, call **617-355-3501** or visit [bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed](https://www.bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed)



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